

Title	Ensuring educational opportunities for children in conflict-affected contexts : A case study of Syrian refugee-managed schools in Turkey
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Citation	Osaka Human Sciences. 4 p.135-p.156
Issue Date	2018-03
oaire:version	VoR
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.18910/68284">https://doi.org/10.18910/68284</a>
rights	
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## **ENSURING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS: A CASE STUDY OF SYRIAN REFUGEE-MANAGED SCHOOLS IN TURKEY**

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### **Abstract**

The key actor within the scope of refugee education has been shifting from external agencies to the refugees themselves over time. In recent years, refugees have taken the initiative to fulfill their demands for education. Ninety percent of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey live outside of the refugee camp and some part of them run independent schools in urban areas. However, the actual dynamics of their education are not outwardly reflected in statistics such as school enrollment ratio and remain largely unknown.

The objective of this study is to examine the school operation mechanisms managed by Syrian urban refugees. The fieldwork took place in two southern Turkish provinces adjacent to the Syrian border for nine weeks in total during 2013 and 2015. Interviews and participant observations were conducted with Syrian school stakeholders.

This study reveals four factors below as characteristics of elements allowing school education by Syrian refugees in Turkey to function: (1) Partial cooperative relationship between the stakeholders of the education for Syrian refugees; (2) Involvement of Turkish governmental organizations and responses by each school; (3) Connections between international/domestic supporters and Syrian schools; and (4) Ensuring diploma certificates and the impact the certificates have on student lives.

Currently, it is difficult for unstably managed Syrian schools alone to respond to all the educational demands from Syrian refugees hoping for bridges to higher education. However, it is true that the expansion of education is being facilitated by activities by Syrian refugees themselves.

**Key words:** Syrian refugees; Turkey; refugee-run school education; urban refugees in non-camp areas

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This article is the English translation of the original one “Yamamoto, Kaoru (2016) Ensuring Educational Opportunities for Children in Conflict-Affected Contexts: A Case Study of Syrian Refugee-Managed Schools in Turkey. *Journal of Multicultural Innovation*, 3, 213–238 (in Japanese)”. The publication of its English translation has been permitted by Institute for Academic Initiatives Group 5 (RESPECT Program) Office, Osaka University.

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## Introduction

Even after fleeing from conflict and evacuating to safe grounds, refugee children still face many threats in their daily lives. These threats include issues that involve society as a whole, such as loss of access to public services including education. Moreover, there are also damages for individuals which impacts children's lives for a long period of time, which is physical and mental violence due to conflicts and their social psychological impacts (Davies 2004; Muldoon 2013). Conflicts have tremendous negative effects on education, such as functional difficulties of educational facilities due to their destruction, use as tentative shelters, and shortage of educational personnel (Machel 2000; Sinclair 2005; Demirdjian 2011). Due to these circumstances, refugees become one of the groups with the largest difficulty getting access to education (Sinclair 2007).

The number of refugee children who are 18 years old or younger accounts for 51% of the total population of 19.5 million refugees, which equates to 9.95 million refugee children worldwide (UNHCR 2015a: 3). Their school enrollment ratio is estimated at 76% for primary education and 36% for secondary education (Dryden-Peterson 2011: 6). Expansion of education for conflict-affected children including refugees is essential for achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA). The implementation of EFA was emphasized with respect to the Dakar Framework for Action selected in the World Education Forum in 2000 (Komatsu 2005: 220). The Incheon Declaration that was adopted at the same forum held in May of 2015 also refers to education in conflict-affected situation (World Education Forum 2015: 2–3). The Declaration states that an “inclusive, responsive, and resilient” educational system must be developed for internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees, considering that most of the out-of-school population live in conflict-affected areas (Ibid.).

For refugee children and their families, going to school can be a means to re-establish the daily routine that they have lost due to conflicts, and education can be an investment towards their future lives (Utsumi 2005; Komatsu 2005: 210). Additionally, education is expected to protect children from daily threats (Nicolai and Triplehorn 2003: 9–10). Thus recognition on the importance of education is internationally shared. However, educational situation of refugees in the majority of nations, including developed countries, have not been apparent in statistics. Though education may be raised as one of the top policy priority for humanitarian assistance, it is not regarded as important as life necessities in emergencies (Bird 2003).

Until the 1990s, the main actors who provided educational support to refugees were governments or UN agencies. Since 2000s, NGOs took over part of the role, and the key educational actors became those who are much closer to the field (UNESCO 2015). Additionally, along with the increase of urban refugee population<sup>1)</sup>, the trends of refugee lives have been

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<sup>1)</sup> This is not necessarily limited to refer to settlers in urban areas, but all non-camp refugees.

changing. Along with changes such as urbanization, the distribution of refugee population becomes similar to that of non-refugee population (Jacobsen 2006). Today, more refugees head to cities and towns instead of camps and shelters in rural areas. Unlike refugee camps where people live in collective residential areas under management of the host government or UN agencies, lives of urban refugees become diversified; simultaneously, the humanitarian aid required by those various people becomes more complex. This is why NGOs, which are able to give support for refugees more attentively, have come to hold a leading position also in the field of educational implementation for refugees. Furthermore, in recent years, more diversified needs for satisfying refugees' welfare including education that are even difficult for NGOs to tackle, are being fulfilled through activities conducted by refugees themselves.

The Syrian Arab Republic fell into a state of conflict in 2011 to become the country generating the world's largest amount of refugees in 2014 (UNHCR 2015a: 14). As of 2015, one out of six Syrians seeks asylum outside Syria and becomes a refugee<sup>2)</sup>. A characteristic of Syrian refugees is their tendency to head to urban areas. Of approximately 4 million Syrian refugees residing in 5 neighboring countries (Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt), 85% of them are living outside of camps (UNHCR 2015a: 43). In particular, 90% of Syrian refugees who have evacuated to Turkey accommodate outside of camps (calculated by the author from the chart in Erdogan 2014: 54). They are living in urban areas where it is difficult to receive external support, and are surviving by using individual living means. Activities conducted by the refugees themselves have developed to the level of school administration. Refugees have already become beneficiaries of educational support as well as actors of education provision. Despite this, the actual status of educational activities run by refugees remains unclear.

The purpose of this study is to examine the school education mechanism that ensures schooling for urban refugee children, while focusing on the perspective of Syrian school stakeholders in Turkey based on case studies at schools operated by refugees. This paper first examines previous studies on refugee education focusing on urban refugees as well as refugee-run school education (Section 1). It will also grasp the educational situation of the people in Syria before the conflict and in the neighboring countries after the conflict has erupted (Section 2), and take on a bird's eye view of Syrian refugee acceptance and enrollment to schools in Turkey (Section 3). Then after presenting the outline of fieldwork conducted at the border area with Syria in southern Turkey (Section 4), it will organize the main actors that are involved in school administration for Syrian urban refugees in order to elucidate the function and role of each stakeholder as well as about the dynamics of the school education created in associations among the main actors (Section 5). Finally, this paper will examine the functions which both promote and hamper school administration operations by Syrian refugees following the discussion in the previous sections (Section 6).

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<sup>2)</sup> Of all 23 million Syrian citizens, 4.01 million became refugees (UNHCR 2015b).

## 1. Literature review on refugee education

### *1.1 Urban refugees and schools*

Humanitarian aids that urban refugees can receive from external organizations are comparatively little in comparison to what refugees in camps do. This inevitably makes the relationship between urban refugees and school education different from that of camp refugees. As urban refugees blend into the host community in many cases, statistics of their education and even demographics are uncertain. Despite this uncertainty, according to a household survey conducted in 62 countries, the average of primary school enrollment ratio of urban refugees is 64% (as of 2008, UNHCR 2009: 12), which is comparatively lower than that of refugees as a whole. However, the actual school enrollment ratio is likely much lower. It is because of the fact that public statistics often do not reveal the status of the urban refugees, as well as the fact that there is a growing population of urban refugees accompanying the current increase in Syrian refugees.

The educational configuration that is deemed ideal for urban refugees is enrollment into the local schools of the host country (Sinclair 2001; Dryden-Peterson 2011). In this case, the main educational support for urban refugees is provision of funds necessary for schooling, such as scholarship programs which aim for quantitative expansion of refugees' enrollment (Dryden-Peterson 2011). Furthermore, for the purpose of qualitative improvement, adaptation to different languages and curriculums is promoted, and integration into local schools is urged after eliminating discrimination and harassment that refugees receive from teachers and/or classmates (Ibid.).

However, there are cases when the system in the country of asylum does not allow refugee children to attend local public schools. In such cases, it becomes necessary to establish non-formal educational facility for refugee children. This kind of school is often established in refugee camps, but there are some cases where such schools or facilities in the form of educational/learning centers have been built in cities (e.g. Sinclair 2001; Nirrengarten 2010; Rahman 2011). This being said, many of these schools are built as tentative measures in emergencies (Sinclair 2001: 18). That is why they have only short-time operational visions in many cases, and it gives rise to challenges for these schools in various aspects, such as provision of diploma certificates at the time of students' graduation. Because of these challenges, this sort of educational facilities tend to be seen as a second option compared to local schools. Even so, for refugees, a school that is dedicated to them is a valuable option in that they can enjoy education based on their own native language, curriculum, and socio-cultural background in a place of refuge (Dryden-Peterson 2011). These educational activities often start after receiving demands from the refugee community, but the implementation of them are deeply dependent on involvement from external organizations such as UNHCR, UNICEF, or other NGOs despite these activities being known as the "refugee initiative."

### *1.2 “Refugee initiative” school education*

Examples from various areas regarding voluntary educational activities by refugees have been reported since the 1970s (e.g. Dodds and Inquai 1983; Gezelius 1996; Dryden-Peterson 2011). Such activities were realizations of demands for education from refugees, and have increased educational opportunities for refugee children. However, they are always acknowledged to be related inseparably with support from external organizations. In many cases, refugee communities with a heightened awareness for education approach humanitarian organizations including UNHCR, UNICEF, or other international groups engaging in refugee and/or educational support, and establish school facilities with their aid. These cases are reported from the perspective of these humanitarian organizations.

International humanitarian aid organizations such as UNHCR place importance on involvement of external organizations for refugee education as a prevention measure, because of the concerns that biased political messages (mainly, strong indignation against political oppositions who are considered to be the cause of the refugee group’s forced migration) will be delivered to children or youths through education by refugee educational personnel who take leadership (Davies 2004: 157). This is why granting full mandate of educational operation to refugees is not necessarily favorably regarded. In this context, “refugee initiative” merely means that the proportion of refugees’ will is fairly large in comparison with school administrations fully controlled by external organizations.

With this background of refugee education, the cases of Syrian refugees’ education in Turkey, which is the target of this paper, is similar to other cases in that the refugees maintain a strong enthusiasm towards education and try to initiate education activities by themselves. However, there is specificity of the case in how they build their unique education system. This paper will analyze how the Turkish governmental organization, the Syrian refugee’s educational actors, and the supporting group/individuals become connected with each other to ensure educational opportunities for Syrian refugee children amid the transforming trends of international aid regarding urban refugee education.

## **2. Background of Syrian refugees and their educational conditions**

### *2.1 Conditions and education in Syria before the conflict*

Syria is a country with a population of 23 million (in 2013), located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea with Arabic as its official language. After the country broke free from French mandatory and succeeded in a coup d’état by the Ba’ath Party in 1963 led by former president Hafez al-Assad, the Assad regime has been exercising hereditary rule of the country for over 50 years up to its current president, Bashar al-Assad (since 2000). The Ba’ath Party has been trying to unify Syria, a country of mixed characters of localities, religious groups, and ethnicities (Rabo 1996: 167), under the umbrella of “Arab Identity,” which consists of socialism and Pan-Arabism.

In the preamble of the Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic which was revised in 2012, it is stated that “The Syrian Arab Republic is proud of its Arab Identity, and... embodies this belonging in its national and pan-Arab project... in order to promote integration and achieve the unity of the Arab nation” (Syrian Arab Republic 2012). Many who were born and raised in Syria identify themselves as Syrian, regardless of the current conditions of the nation, and feel that ancestral legacies are shared with their fellow citizens (Rabo 1996: 167). Meanwhile, diversity of those who have been marginalized has been suppressed by the government, under the supposed just cause of integration into the Arab Identity. These daily pressures by the government are believed to be one of the causes which triggered the conflict. After March of 2011, conflicting parties from inside and outside of Syria have mingled within the country, causing a critical crisis. The situation in the country is serious, with over 320 thousand deaths from the conflict (as of June 2015: Syrian Observatory for Human Rights 2015), 7.6 million IDPs (as of December 2014: UNHCR 2015a), and 4.3 million refugees (as of November 2015: UNHCR 2015b). The majority of Syrians’ lives and livelihoods are under threat.

The Syrian school system can be classified into three stages: primary education, which lasts 6 years from the age of 6 (1<sup>st</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> grade), intermediate education, which lasts 3 years (7<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> grade), and secondary education, which also lasts 3 years (10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grade) (UNESCO-IBE 2011). Though compulsory education is provided for the 6 years of primary education, free education in all stages is afforded for Syrian people. Foreign language courses of English or French that students can select from are incorporated into primary education<sup>3)</sup>. In secondary education, schools separate into schools for general, technical, and vocational courses (UNESCO-IBE 2011).

Educational gaps attributable to diversity have been consistently pointed out until the 2000s with respect to Syria, which is home to a diverse population of citizens. Typical examples of these gaps are low school enrollment ratio for girls in rural areas (Rabo 1996), and oppression against Kurdish residents<sup>4)</sup>. Because of these backgrounds, the net enrollment ratio of intermediate education, which is non-compulsory, is 67.1% (as of 2010: World Bank EdStats), which cannot be regarded as high considering that it was slightly lower than the average of the Middle Eastern region (69.5% in the same year: Ibid.). However, the net enrollment ratio for primary education in 2011 before the conflict had been maintained at a high standard of 99.1% (Ibid.), which was a sound progress towards EFA (UNICEF 2011). Additionally, with regard to the percentage of students who proceed to the secondary education from the intermediate level, boys, who had a

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<sup>3)</sup> As of 2001, foreign language courses are being implemented for 3 hours a week in 5<sup>th</sup> year primary education (UNESCO-IBE 2011).

<sup>4)</sup> In 1962, approximately 12,000 (20%) of Kurdish residents living in Syria were suspected to have been smuggled into Syria in an attempt to establish a Kurdish state (Tejel 2009: 51). Their citizenship was forfeited, and they were registered as “foreigners” by authorities so as to be extradited from Syrian society (Ibid.). Since then, until deregulation in 2005, these residents did not possess Syrian citizenship, and were not entitled to enter the secondary education (10<sup>th</sup> grade), which is not compulsory, nor any education afterwards.



consistently higher percentage than girls until 2000, were exceeded by girls in 2005<sup>5)</sup>. The shrinking gender gap inflated expectations for improvement of the school enrollment ratio for secondary education. Because of all these improving educational situation before the war in Syria, education is indispensable for Syrian people even after becoming refugees. On the other hand, Syria, the third largest refugee-hosting country until 2011 (UNHCR 2012: 15), was not only fraught with educational issues for Palestine and Iraqi refugees, but also had issues with observation and control<sup>6)</sup> in schools by the government.

## *2.2 Educational trends of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries*

Of the refugees from Syria, 94% reside in the five countries surrounding Syria: Turkey (2.2 million Syrian refugees in Turkey), Lebanon (1.08 million in Lebanon), Jordan (0.63 million in Jordan), Iraq (0.25 million in Iraq), and Egypt (0.13 million in Egypt) (UNHCR 2015b). School-aged Syrian refugees who are enrolled in primary and secondary schools in those countries are estimated as 31% in Lebanon, 40% in Turkey, 61% in Iraq, 85% in Jordan, and 98% in Egypt (UNICEF MENA Regional Office 2015: 2). Those four countries, excluding Turkey, use Arabic for their official language similar to Syria, which promotes refugee absorption to their local schools. Additionally, Jordan and Iraq established camps for Syrian refugees so that they have easier access to educational opportunities and school enrollment statistics can readily be gathered.

On the other hand, since there are no official camps set up in Lebanon, refugees are forced to stay in Informal Tented Settlements (ITS) or in regular housing. ITS is an unofficially occupied housing area where refugees who cannot afford to obtain a place to live in the urban area have settled down (UNICEF 2014: 1). People living in ITS are said to remain in the most deteriorating living conditions among Syrian refugees (Ibid.). Syrian refugees living in ITS are 12.5% of the population in Lebanon, and other 85% in cities and towns also live in vulnerable areas (Ahmadzadeh et al. 2014: 35). Syrian refugees in Lebanon are placed under comparatively challenging conditions, and it is difficult to grasp their living situations compared to other countries. This might be the reason why the school enrollment ratio of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon appears to be the lowest. The school enrollment condition in Turkey, which is the main focus in this study, will be discussed in the next section.

<sup>5)</sup> In 1998, the percentage of students who went on to secondary education was 74.3% for boys and 68.8% for girls, but girls (98.8%) slightly exceeded boys (98.3%) in 2005 (World Bank EdStats).

<sup>6)</sup> With respect to instructions, though any teaching method could have been applied according to each classroom environment, monitoring personnel from the Ministry of Education would visit and monitor the class atmosphere and gave instructions on teachers' method of teaching and their attitudes during the class (Zarad 2014).



### 3. Syrian refugees' lives and education in Turkey

#### 3.1 Turkey's policy on accepting Syrian refugees

Turkey, which is surrounded by the three regions of Asia, Africa, and Europe, has long been a host country for many and diverse refugees from all of these regions; this is why Turkey has been referred to as a hub for immigrants including refugees (Mannaert 2003). Turkey has ratified the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention) since its conclusion in 1951, and has not yet removed the geographical conditions for refugee acceptance since then. Therefore, Turkey does not provide official refugee status unless refugees are from European countries (Government of Turkey 2006).

Acceptance of Syrian refugees has been relatively generous since the onset of the conflict in 2011, and currently more than 2.2 million people from Syria live all over Turkey (as of November 2015: UNHCR 2015b). The number of Syrian refugees in Turkey is the largest among the five Syria-surrounding countries, and consists of 51% of the entire population. This means that the majority of Syrian refugees have been accepted by Turkey. Syrian refugees in Turkey are not treated as official refugees, but referred to as “Guests” (Ozden 2013). However, the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) was established in April 2014 under Turkey's Ministry of Interior in response to the drastic increase of the Syrian refugee population. Registration of Syrian refugees has started, along with official acknowledgement for them to be under temporary protection of the Turkish government (DGMM 2014).

The characteristic of the support for Syrian refugees in Turkey is that Turkish actors in the country, particularly the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı (in Turkish): AFAD), plays a central role. In other host countries of mass Syrian refugees, such as Lebanon and Jordan, UNHCR or other external international refugee support organizations are at the core of the humanitarian service. In that sense, Turkey can be said to be implementing their own aid strategy for Syrian refugees.

#### 3.2 Schooling of Syrian refugees in Turkey

School-aged Syrian refugees who applied for asylum in Turkey as well as their families are stipulated to enroll primary and secondary education even before their application is processed (DGMM 2014: 89). They are allowed to enroll in local Turkish schools or Syrian schools<sup>7)</sup> established in and out of camps (UNHCR Turkey 2015). At the time of enrollment to a local school, a registration to the Turkish government and either of a residence permit/temporary asylum certificate/alien ID is required.

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<sup>7)</sup> Though UNICEF uniformly refers to newly established educational facilities for Syrians in Turkey as “Temporary Educational Centers,” this name does not reflect how schools are actually operated (many of them are not temporary, and functions more like regular schools than educational centers); accordingly, this paper will use the terminology of “Syrian Schools.”

Many of the refugees residing in camps attend schools that have been established within the camp. On the other hand, refugees residing outside of these camps have various options: attend to local schools, or Syrian schools. If they choose to go to a Syrian school, they must then decide which Syrian school to go. However, in spite of these options, the reality when enrolling or transferring to a Turkish local school is that each school may require a certain level of proficiency in the Turkish language so that students can keep up with classes, or require a Syrian diploma or grade transcript even if the aforementioned requirements are met. Furthermore, even after a Syrian child is accepted in local Turkish schools, he/she may be harassed by school managers, teachers, or classmates because of their “Syrian” and/or “refugee” label. In this situation, for those who live outside of the camp, it is easier to enroll in Syrian schools than local schools. The administration conditions of Syrian schools will be discussed in detail based on the fieldwork in the following sections, since there is little reliable reference to draw upon for it.

Syrian refugees who have been recognized by UNICEF as students of local school or Syrian schools in Turkey are only a total of 210,000, which accounts for about 40% of school-aged Syrian children in the country (UNICEF MENA Regional Office 2015). Considering that this number includes refugee children in camps, the majority of the children outside of the camps are possibly not enrolled in schools. However, Syrian schools in non-camp areas were not built by Turkish authorities, UNICEF, or other official agencies. Most of them are schools which are voluntarily operated by Syrian refugees. Turkish government does not reveal the information regarding this kind of school, and UNICEF, who plays the major role as an international education aid provider in Turkey, does not have detailed information (UNICEF MENA Regional Office 2015). Even the number of Syrian schools operated in Turkey and the number of students enrolled are unclear, these schools are not officially registered and the information about these schools are scattered (Ibid.: 45). According to the interviews in the fieldwork, there are as many as 500 Syrian-managed schools in Turkey. However, these statistics alone are insufficient to understanding the actual state of schooling for Syrian refugee children.

#### **4. Outline of the fieldwork in Turkey**

The series of fieldwork was conducted for approximately nine weeks in total during the three periods of March 8<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> in 2013, September 8<sup>th</sup> to October 5<sup>th</sup> in 2013, and May 10<sup>th</sup> to June 8<sup>th</sup> in 2015. The primary sites of the fieldwork were the Hatay and Şanlıurfa provinces, which is located in southern Turkey on the border with Syria. In Hatay Province, the fieldwork was conducted during all the three periods above, but the fieldwork in Şanlıurfa Province took place only once in 2015.

##### *4.1 Hatay Province*

Hatay Province, with a population of 1.48 million citizens, hosts a registered Syrian refugee

population of 200,000, and urban refugees comprise its 93% (Erdogan 2014). The fieldwork in the Hatay Province were mainly conducted in the capital city Antakya, and supplementary investigations took place in a school in Altinoz city, where a refugee camp is situated. Antakya city has a total of seven primary and secondary Syrian schools, and this study targeted four of those schools.

There are two characteristics of Hatay Province. One is that this province used to be Syrian territory until 1938 after World War I, so with many citizens are able to understand both Turkish and Arabic languages and some of them are rooted in Syria. The other is that many people are Alawite Muslims, who share the religious belief with the current Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad. Since most citizens of the province support the long-standing Assad regime being the same religious minority, this background easily puts the province under a state of friction over political and religious positions between the local Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees, the latter of which are mostly Sunni Muslims who consider themselves to have fled from Assad's oppression, despite sharing Arabic as a common language.

#### *4.2 Şanlıurfa Province*

There are approximately 240,000 Syrian refugees registered in Şanlıurfa Province, whose total population is 1.76 million (Erdogan 2014). Urban refugees comprise 83%, which means that the majority of Syrian refugees in Şanlıurfa lives outside of camps similarly to refugees in Hatay (Ibid.). The fieldwork was conducted in the capital city of Şanlıurfa. Two schools out of 11 primary and secondary schools in the city were investigated, and a pre-primary school were targeted as a supplement.

One of the characteristics of Şanlıurfa Province is the abundance of Kurdish citizens, and many Syrian refugees who evacuate to this province are also Kurdish. Though there are no accurate statistics about the origins of the refugees, nearly half of Syrian refugees residing in Şanlıurfa Province are estimated to be Kurdish. Most of them fled from their hometowns at the time of the Islamic State's invasion of Ayn al-Arab (Kobanî in Kurdish) in September of 2014. Part of southeast Turkey which includes Şanlıurfa Province, as well as northeastern Syria and northwestern Iraq are residential zones for Kurds, and they stretch out over the boundary between nations. Many people living in that area, including local Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees, share the Kurdish identity. With the background of Kurdish descent and the conservative cultural climate of the province, citizens in Şanlıurfa are said to be relatively amicable toward Syrian refugee support policies that are promoted by the current Turkish government.

#### *4.3 Basic data of target schools and data-collecting method*

The basic information of the target schools are illustrated in Table 1. It is possible to enroll in these Syrian schools, even if the children do not meet the conditions that the local Turkish schools require. For example, if one has some personal connection with a school there, he/she

TABLE 1. Basic information of the target schools

	Location	Year of establishment	Constituent Grades	Tuition (TL)	No. of teachers (no. of F)	No. of students (no. of F)
A	Antakya	September, 2011	Grade 1–8	Free	51 (45)	790 (418)
B	Antakya	September, 2011	Grade 9–12	100	21 (10)	368 (205)
C	Antakya	January, 2013	Grade 1–9	30	23 (21)	470 (300)
D	Antakya	April, 2013	Grade 1–12	230	59 (31)	630 (—)
E	Altinoz	February, 2014	Grade 1–12	30	32 (—)	600 (—)
F	Şanlıurfa	August, 2012	Grade 1–6	Free	36 (26)	1,188 (523)
G	Şanlıurfa	October, 2013	Grade 7–12	Free	16 (7)	300 to 400 (—)
H	Şanlıurfa	December, 2013	(2–5 years old)	120	5 (5)	45 (—)

Note: Tuition indicates yearly payment amounts. TL = Turkish lira (1TL = approximately 0.38 USD). (—) indicates there is no data.

can, in many cases, be enrolled in the school without documents such as official IDs. There are various types of Syrian schools because they do not have comprehensive operational guidelines. As for the target schools, many of them are managed renting rooms in residential buildings and three to six rooms per floor are allocated for classrooms, teachers' room and management office. A school with sufficient funds can utilize an entire building as a school, but other schools rent, for instance, only the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors as part of the school, and the other floors, such as the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors, are occupied by ordinary Turkish families.

In each school, semi-structured interviews, narrative interviews, and observations in classrooms and teachers' room were conducted. The interviews were conducted with school managers (1 to 2 from each school), teachers (5 to 7 from each school) and students (10 to 15 from each school). What was asked were issues necessary to understand basic information regarding the school administrative situation (stakeholders' backgrounds and their number, school schedule, methods of instruction and teaching materials to use, circumstances of external supports, etc.), as well as their efforts and issues regarding school establishment and operation, and the relationship between Turkish governmental organizations and other Syrian schools. Aside from the school, parents and families of students, graduates of Syrian schools, and Syrian refugees living around the schools were approached for interviews to investigate their perspectives on school education as well as the impact of schools on their lives.

## 5. Educational system of Syrian schools operated outside of the camps

### 5.1 Curriculum and textbook creation by Syrian actors

Syrian actors mainly include managers, teachers and students of Syrian schools, as well as an organization that calls itself the "Syrian Education Commission (SEC)" and an organization that calls itself the Ministry of Education (MoE) of the "Syrian Interim Government (SIG)." They

influence all aspects of education for all Syrian refugees in Turkey. SEC was formed by Syrian educational affiliates, including refugees, in February of 2013; it aimed to expand educational opportunities for Syrian refugee children. It is registered and has been approved as a NPO by the Turkish government. While SEC is an organization specialized in education, SIG is a political organization established in 2013 under the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, which started in Doha in 2012. SIG is, under the slogan of an “anti-Syrian regime,” supported by various countries, such as the U.S. and gulf states, which are against the current Syrian regime and has a strong cooperation with Turkish government both overtly and covertly. Within the SIG, the MoE is comparatively new, and was established in November of 2014. These newly established organizations do not represent all the Syrian schools, but both create new curriculums based on those of Syria. Detailed curriculums (subjects, number of hours by subject, instruction contents, etc.) are set forth by each Syrian school and its teachers based on its own policies, philosophies, and educational resources such as number of teachers per subject. Many schools omit subjects that are not reflected in examination performance, such as music or P.E., depending on whether or not school equipment, teaching material, or teachers for the subject are available. Currently, managing or monitoring systems for changes in these curriculums do not exist.

The biggest change with respect to curriculums is that Turkish language classes have already been introduced into every Syrian school before the creation of the curriculum by SEC and SIG’s MoE. This was a measure taken due to the anticipation by many Syrian refugees that children would likely have to stay in Turkey for a long period of time due to the conflict being prolonged in their home country. In Syria, English and French language classes start from primary level, but many Syrian schools in Turkey teach Turkish instead of French. Currently, those who teach Turkish language at Syrian schools are mostly Turkish personnel allocated by the Turkish regional education office. While the average salary for Syrian teachers is in the range between unpaid to 600 TL (approximately 227 USD), these Turkish language teachers are paid 3,500 TL (approximately 1,324 USD) a month from the regional education office. The relationships between these Turkish language teachers and other Syrian school staff vary by school. For example, in School B, Syrians did not try to have active communication with the Turkish language teacher as they have determined that they cannot make themselves understood because of the language barrier. While other teachers chatted with each other in the teachers’ room, the Turkish language teacher sat alone silently. A manager of School D (male, 50’s) mentioned the salary gap between Syrian teachers and Turkish language teachers, and complained: “we work in the same school, so why the difference?” Meanwhile, at School E, a Turkish language teacher was teaching Turkish to Syrian teachers after school for free; this Turkish teacher’s relationship with Syrian managers and teachers was well-maintained.

Textbooks are published in Turkey by SEC and SIG’s MoE. SEC published the latest edition of textbooks in 2013, and SIG’s MoE followed suit in 2014. Although both textbooks are free

and there is no remarkable difference in their contents, many Syrian schools use the latter, which is newer. One reason why schools adopt curriculums and textbooks by SIG's MoE is the baccalaureate that Syrian students take at the time of graduation from the Syrian secondary school. Since 2014, SIG became the actor which implements the baccalaureate.

The textbooks edited by SEC and SIG's MoE both cover every fundamental point that the Syrian textbooks do in their home country. However, subjects related to Syrian history, politics, and other subjects that cover sociological events such as social studies, history, and political science have been modified or deleted with respect to descriptions or photos of the current regime and the president. Particularly in the subject named "Political Science," there are many references to the Assad regime and the Ba'ath Party. Because of that, some school managers replaced the subject with a Moral Education class (School A and B). A majority of Syrian refugees residing in the targeted areas consider their reason for forced migration out of the country to be oppression or persecution by the current Syrian regime. Therefore, modifying contents of classes and description on textbooks which treat the Assad regime and the Ba'ath Party as the national foundation of Syria can be considered as an expression of opposition by Syrian refugee actors against the current regime, as well as an emergence of a developing ideology that is being formed at the new location to which they have evacuated.

This being said, a school manager (School F, female, 29 years old) who adopted the textbook by SIG's MoE in her school made the justification that "our school has nothing to do with SIG. This is the only textbook available in Turkey (Syrians can't use Turkey's local textbook because it is written in Turkish), so we have to use it." SIG is an organization that is strongly political in nature. School officials do not necessarily consider a close relationship with SEC or SIG's MoE to be strictly beneficial. Each school has built a partially-cooperative relationship with necessary organizations in necessary fields based on their operational conditions and interests, in order to maintain voluntary and strategic management of their schools.

### *5.2 Relationship between Turkish governmental organizations and Syrian actors*

Education for Syrian refugees in Turkey is said to be under the jurisdiction of Turkey's Ministry of National Education (MoNE) as well as the regional education office. Deployed personnel from the central government have been stationed in the regional education office, and it maintains close coordination with the government.

School administration by Syrian refugees was managed primarily independently and outside of the jurisdiction of the Turkish authority until 2013 since their emergence in late 2011. With respect to this independence, the Turkish authority, especially the regional education office, often overlooked it despite knowing the existence of Syrian schools. At the time, Syrian schools, which had not been approved by any authorities of Turkey nor Syria, were accepting children under an unstable condition wherein they could have been forced to close at any time. School A, which was established in September of 2011, was forced to close twice by the regional education

office up until 2012 (Yamamoto et al. 2013).

Meanwhile, Turkish authorities changed their stance towards Syrian schools after mid-2014. The regional education office began dispatching a Turkish official, referred to as “coordinators,” to each Syrian school to collect basic information about the school, including the number of students and teachers as well as their personal information. These coordinators were called “Turkish eyes” by Syrian teachers because they considered the coordinators to be monitoring them. Though these teachers complained that these coordinators do not provide direct support to the school administration, they also expressed that “as long as there is a coordinator in the school, there is no risk of the school being closed.” Coordinators are dispatched to Syrian schools to monitor them, which leads to a minimum assurance for sustainable school administration.

A manager of School A (male, 40’s) explained the reason why Turkish authorities changed their stances toward Syrian schools as follows: “we visited the regional education office so many times to ask for the approval of school management by Syrians. No matter how many times we were closed down, we rose back up... They (the Turkish authority) had no choice but to acknowledge us.” From his narratives, we can see his strong sense of authority in the school management, as well as pride in being an agent of change to transform the system in which they manage Syrian schools in Turkey.

In the case of School F, which was established in August of 2012, the involvement of the regional education office was a larger issue. After a Turkish coordinator was deployed to the school, the original Syrian manager was discharged from his position and a new Syrian who was appointed by the coordinator took over. Since then, more than half of the 18 Syrian teachers, who had been involved in the establishment of the school, resigned from School F and transferred to other Syrian schools. Of the original teachers at School F, there were only seven teachers who remain working there, and the other teachers were newly employed after 2014. School F’s new Syrian manager (aforementioned), who was appointed in January of 2015, said that “the Turkish educational system is more modern than the Syrian system,” and expressed a more positive attitude towards the operation policy by the Turkish authority.

Involvement of Turkish authorities in Syrian schools differs between School A in Hatay Province and School F in Şanlıurfa Province. Though Syrian managers in both schools displayed an affirmative attitude towards the Turkish authorities, these attitudes are fundamentally different. The manager of School A had this to say about the Turkish coordinator: “he trusts us, so he leaves the school management to us.” The manager accepted the Turkish authority’s involvement in the school on the premise that it preserved the independence of Syrian actors. On the flipside, the manager of School F is submissive to policies formed by the Turkish authorities. The depth of involvement by the Turkish authority is different among schools, given the attitudes of the Syrian managers and the Turkish authorities towards each other, as well as the relationship between them.



### *5.3 Global support for Syrian schools by organizations and individuals*

Intervention from international organizations such as UN agencies is rarely done in Turkey, and Syrians and the Turkish authorities undertake the core of educational activities. For Syrian schools with a small resource that are operated by refugees, external material and financial supports are essential. Individuals and organizations that provide support for Syrian schools can be categorized into the following four groups: (1) International organizations in charge of refugee/educational support such as UNHCR and UNICEF, and other national and international humanitarian assistance organizations, (2) Local NGOs in Turkey, (3) Syrian groups located in and out of the country, and (4) Individual volunteers. The organizations that belong to (1) and (2) are approved their humanitarian activities in Turkey by the Turkish government, but as for a majority of the groups and individuals of (3) and (4) are not.

Supports from (1) International organizations and (2) Local NGOs consisted not only of material aids such as bags, shoes, stationery, and textbooks, but also of teacher salaries of amounts up to 220 TL (approximately 82 USD) per month from UNICEF (School C, D, F and G). However, these forms of support were mostly given sporadically and within a limited period of time, which is insufficient to provide fundamental support for sustainable school management. On the other hand, (3) Syrian groups and (4) Individual volunteers often share the same political or religious ideologies with school managers, and those forms of support are continuously provided. Unfortunately, most of them are supporting Syrian schools non-officially because these groups or individuals are not approved by the Turkish government.

Furthermore, even supporters who are providing continuous support for a Syrian school focus on large-scale incidents in Syria as they occur, which frequently diverts support away from the schools. The long-lasting chaos within Syria, which still sees no signs of resolution, is negatively impacting the sustainable school management even beyond the border. Moreover, since the Turkish government's involvement was enhanced after 2014, it became more difficult to receive supports from individuals or groups that have not gained approval in Turkey. Because of this restriction from Turkish government, Syrian school stakeholders have to follow complicated procedures in order to raise necessary funds. Sometimes they obtain international donations through individuals who have bank accounts in Turkey and serve as a mediator. Consequently, their source of income has continued to shrink since intensification of involvement of the Turkish government.

Many Syrian schools do not explicitly disclose sources of income and its receiving process. On their accounting reports, these issues are only described as "large amount of funds granted from generous volunteers," with no description of the background of those "volunteers" or their relationship with the school, nor a clear indication of the individual donated amounts. For example, a school manager (male, 40's) of a certain Syrian school had a Syrian friend living in Saudi Arabia, who financed rent for the school building as well as salaries for the teachers. His donation accounted for more than 15,950 TL (approximately 6,000 USD) per month (Yamamoto

et al. 2013). Tracing back the relationship between the donor and the manager of School B, it was found that they had worked together as anti-government activists in Syria before they left the country. If these school managers' backgrounds are exposed to the public, not only will the impartiality of the school administration come under suspicion, but also the undercover militia of the Syrian regime in the area may find these school officials and send them back to Syria to apprehend, put into custody, or put under much more severe dangers. Despite being displaced in other countries, refugees who reside especially in nearby bordering areas have not completely escaped the context of conflict. Given this background, it is extremely difficult to verify the flow of Syrian school's funds.

#### *5.4 Ensuring diploma certificates and its instability involving various actors*

Most Syrian refugees who enroll in Syrian school up to secondary education usually hope to proceed to higher education. How to make Syrian students' diploma certificates ensure advancement to higher education is extremely important issue for those involved in the school, including students, parents, teachers, and managers.

Many individuals who graduated from Syrian schools during the academic year 2013/2014 (September of 2013 to August of 2014) have diploma certificates that were issued by the Libyan government. Based on common political and religious ideologies, being against the Assad regime as well as being part of the Sunni branch of Islam, Libyan authorities have formed a coalition with Syrian schools since the middle of 2013. In order to obtain this diploma, Syrian schools in Turkey introduced the Libyan curriculum as well as Libyan textbooks to classes for students in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, which is the highest grade in secondary education, or one year before it, and then took the Libyan diploma certificate. However, due to unstable situations in Libya and the Turkish authorities' intensified involvement in Syrian schools, diploma certificate issued by SIG's MoE has been granted in cooperation with AFAD and MoNE since the academic year of 2014/2015 (September of 2014 through August of 2015). Syrian refugee students who will advance to universities in Turkey after the 2014/2015 academic year are required this diploma certificate issue by SIG.

Let's take a look at this systematic change regarding diploma in line with the case of J (male, 19 years old). J, who graduated from School D in August of 2014, was granted a diploma certificate by the Libyan government. He studied hard for the baccalaureate and earned a high score of 94% average of all subjects in 2014. However, this was not enough to advance to university, so J started preparing for university enrollment in the next year (2015) by taking the Turkish language proficiency exam (TOMER) as well as the university entrance examination for foreign students (YOS). Despite all of his efforts, J was informed at the beginning of June of 2015 that certificates issued by the Libyan government had become invalid for university entrance examinations after 2014/2015, so he had to take the baccalaureate again to acquire SIG's certificate. By that time, J had already spent a whole year after graduating secondary

school to obtain his qualification for university entrance. Moreover, the baccalaureate was to be held at the end of June, though university entrances would occur in September; it would be up in the air as to whether or not he would be able to obtain the results of the baccalaureate during the university application period. Supposing that his baccalaureate examination results were found to be valid, it would be difficult for J to score better in the baccalaureate than the previous year with a preparation period of less than a month. As he realized these disadvantages, he remained silent for a while, and finally said, angrily: “being born smart in a stupid country results in nothing.” After this, J talked to a teacher at School B (male, 30’s). Though this was the first time the teacher had ever heard of a case like this, he didn’t seem surprised. He stated an overarching issue that Syrian schools have: “the problem is that we don’t know what problems we have. Nobody tells us what we should do. What was valid a week ago becomes invalid a week after.”

Just like the issues regarding diploma certificate that many other refugees around the world face<sup>8)</sup>, the effectiveness of SIG’s certificate is not universal. Because this particular diploma certificate is granted by the Turkish government and SIG, which stand strongly against the current Syrian regime, when the holder of this certification returns to Syria, the certificate is found valid in areas that are controlled by anti-governmental groups. On the other hand, there have been cases where the certificate holder was arrested in an area controlled by the government, just for having said certificate. Under the context that the refugees are put under, these certificates emphasize the political aspects of the school education, and automatically add a political significance onto the students. This can not only impact children’s education, but also be a security as well as a threat to their lives and ways of living.

## 6. Two faces of functions supporting Syrian school operation

Based on the research results in the previous section, the actors involved in the management of Syrian schools established outside of refugee camps can be categorized into Syrian actors, Turkish governmental organizations, and supporters in and out of the country. In Turkey, where there is no uniform education system, each party and organization support the sustainable management of Syrian schools while fulfilling their respective functions (Figure 1). However, not all of the functions of each actor necessarily bring about desirable impacts.

Due to the functions of SEC and SIG’s MoE, Syrian refugee children became able to learn in Arabic, their first language, and their original curriculum in Turkey, and were able to simply receive diploma certificates. Furthermore, implementation of the baccalaureate by SIG’s MoE

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<sup>8)</sup> Aside from the government, educational certificates for refugees may be given by UN agencies, but the validity of these certificates varies depending on the country and situation. For example, a school in a Rwandan refugee camp in Tanzania was granted certificate by UNHCR and UNICEF, but when the graduates returned to Rwanda, the Rwandan government did not approve these certificates (Bird 2003: 39).

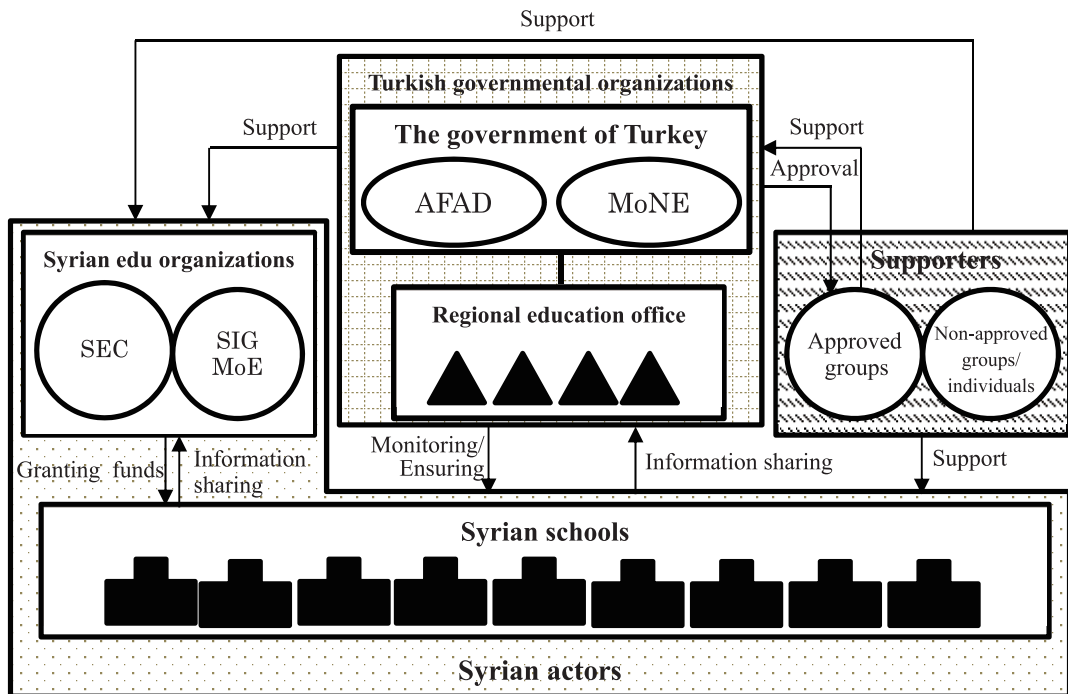


FIGURE 1.  
The structure surrounding Syrian schools in urban areas of Turkey (as of June 2015)

allowed the Turkish government, who has close connections with SIG, to obtain more accurate information regarding Syrian schools within Turkey, which had been more difficult in the past when they were managed independently. However, as Syrian school managers have already pointed out, some of the uniquely modified educational contents show signs of political favoritism, which is not completely approvable for Syrian school managers and teachers. Additionally, the validity of certifications that are approved based on unclear relationships between SIG and the Turkish government is not yet uniform. Though Libyan certificates that were granted for the graduates until 2013/2014 used to be internationally valid, SIG certificates are only considered valid within a limited area, such as Turkey, where SIG is acknowledged. Limited effectiveness of certificate could hinder the scope of refugee children's migration to other countries, and narrows their options with respect to lifestyle.

While the Turkish authority's involvement in Syrian schools functions to ensure the sustainable operations of each school, officials in Syrian schools have emphasized the perspective of this involvement that their school management being monitored. This is a result of many regulations that come along with the country's involvement. The Turkish authority's involvement in Syrian schools is described as "support" and "cooperation," and is praised by external agencies including UNICEF as a generous policy toward Syrian refugees. On the other hand, such "intervention" diminishes the scope of discretionary power that the Syrian school actors hold. Consequently,

with respect to securing sources for funds, obtaining support from groups or individuals who were not approved by the Turkish government became more difficult. Those who had provided continuous support to many Syrian schools were neither members of the Turkish government nor members of any international organizations, but were rather unapproved groups and individual volunteers. Thus, the acquisition of funds for Syrian schools became unstable, and problems have emerged regarding operational foundations.

Up to now, as for education for urban refugees, integration into local schools of the host country was considered the best option. Under the circumstances where enrollment in local schools was possible, refugee schools in cities and towns were deemed to be an alternative option, and the actual conditions of these schools were seldom clarified. With this as a background, the Syrian schools that was focused on in this study seemed to be becoming stable as time went on due to back-up from the Turkish authorities, and seemed to be systematically attempting sustainable management. This tendency towards stabilization is positively regarded by external viewpoints, but it is necessary to be aware that this tendency has two faces. Depending on the angle from which this situation is regarded, the situation reveals many different sides; depending on the perspective, this stabilization might be promoting and hindering the operational sustainment of Syrian schools.

### **Concluding remarks**

The target areas of this study are located close to the Syrian border in Turkey, where conflict has impacted people's lives across the border. The social system surrounding Syrian refugees in the areas is strongly influenced by the political and social conditions of not only Turkey but also Syria. Due to both the underdevelopment and the fluctuation of the system, operational foundations of Syrian schools, along with the lives of Syrian refugees (individuals and families), have been forced into instability. A teacher described current circumstances as "instability that kills people." Currently, enrolling in Syrian schools does not always guarantee advancing opportunities in the future. It is not true in the current situation to say that Syrian schools are living up to the strong educational fervor that refugees have towards advancing to higher education. The gap between educational needs and school management tells us that it is difficult to support school education solely through efforts by refugees.

Many Syrians who engage in school management under these conditions say that it is challenging to operate schools in Turkey. At the same time, a Syrian mother said that "you cannot live a good life without education." Yet, a school manager expressed frustration while trying to bear responsibility for children's education and expressed his feelings by saying that "we can't lose this (school-aged) generation." It remains true that the efforts by people like those above have enabled refugees who are not even able to get support from public organizations or international agencies to gain access to education through the form of refugee's self-support attempts.

With respect to limitations of this study, there was an absence of reliable documents and materials regarding overall regulations/rules such as policy documents, which normally exist; therefore, the study had to rely on unofficial information sources such as interviews. However, the absence of these comprehensive documents and systems itself is what characterizes this independently-operated school education for refugees, and is the reason for why it is necessary to accumulate this type of research. Another limitation was that the targets of interviews tended to be only Syrian school stakeholders. In further studies, it is necessary to grasp the dynamics of comprehensive school administration by Syrian refugees in Turkey through investigation of both Turkish and Syrian actors who are engaging in educational administration, including their development of systems regarding Syrian refugees' education in Turkey, curriculum creation, and so forth. Even despite these limitations, this study made an attempt, using qualitative methods, towards understanding the comprehensive structure of schools operated by refugees, which had previously been overlooked in previous studies which emphasized the view that integration into local schools of host countries was ideal and found that refugee-run schools was of "poor quality" based on insufficient evidence. This attempt should be recognized as the significance of this study.

The school administration activities conducted by Syrian refugees that have been elucidated in this article are very dynamic. These trends, which show various developments over a short amount of time, have greatly contributed to enrollment of Syrian refugee children. Within this framework, refugees are not just beneficiaries of support activities, nor are they merely victims of conflict. Understanding them as active agents and accumulating studies on their characteristics as parties that are directly involved in the educational issues will become even more important.

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